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Thank you cards have an everlasting appeal

School teaches common courtesy the low-tech way: pen and paper

By Brian Joseph

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In an age where technology affords instant communication and the prevailing ethic might be described as "me, me, me," you'd think the handwritten thank you note would be relegated to the dust heap of history.

But it's making a comeback here and across the nation thanks to educators and manners-minded moms.

At the Boys & Girls Club of Palm Springs, hundreds of children from elementary school to high school write thank you notes to holiday donors.

At Sacred Heart School in Palm Desert and Dr. Reynaldo J. Carreon, Jr. Academy in Indio teachers give lessons in etiquette, including writing thank you notes.

According to research by the nation's leading greeting card manufacturer, Hallmark Cards Inc., 58 percent of the nation's moms say their children write thank you notes.

"It's kind of one of those things that you learn at your mother's knee and it's a life time benefit," said Rachel Bolton, spokeswoman for Hallmark.

The company says in recent years its seen a jump in the sales of thank you notes and stationery.

But company research also shows there's still a long way to go. Of the estimated 7 billion cards Americans send annually, only 3 percent are thank you notes.

Etiquette experts say the practice is still largely seen as old-fashioned, tedious and unnecessary. They couldn't disagree more.

"A handwritten thank you note reinforces the connection between the person reading the note and the person writing it," said Cat Wagman, author of "Why ... THANK YOU!"

"I feel that when you read a handwritten note you hear that person's voice. When you read an e-mail it could be from anyone."

A thank you note "tells you what you did was really special," said Lydia Ramsey, the author of "Manners That Sell." And, for those looking to get ahead, "It will

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THANK YOU TIPS

Be brief. "It doesn't have to be a big, lengthy novel. Two to three minutes, five minute at the most. Five minutes is probably enough time," said Corrine Gregory, president and founder of The Polite Child, etiquette curriculum.

Be specific. Don't just write thanks for the gift, say what the gift is, said Lydia Ramsey, author of "Manners that Sell."

Be timely. Get your thank you note out soon after you've received the gift (or been taken out to lunch, granted an interview, whatever). In her book "Why... THANK YOU!", Cat Wagman recommends telling your children "you can't use the gift until you write the note." If you received a lot of gifts at once, write thank yous to the out-of-town guests first.

Be consistent. If you're writing a business thank you note, Ramsey says, make sure its on business stationery. Don't use printed labels if you have a handwritten card.

Be a role model. If you want your kids to write thank you notes, make sure they see you writing them, too, said Rachel Bolton, spokeswoman for Hallmark Cards. If your

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The business world is dominated by the impersonal, quick message. The handwritten letter is an oddity. If you write one, you stand out from the pack, Ramsey said.

That's why she says you can't write too many thank you notes in a business setting. Write them if your boss or a vendor does something nice. Write them if you're granted an interview. Write them if you're taken on a business lunch.

In fact, research from Harvard and Stanford has shown that good social skills do more to determine success in the business world than academic achievement or family background.

"We've gotten informal to the point of being callous," said Corinne Gregory, president and founder of The Polite Child, which produces and markets etiquette curriculum used at schools across the country and in the valley. "I like to say I'm putting the 'civil' back in 'civilization.' "

Gregory is a stickler for good manners and like Ramsey says it's never a wrong time to write a thank you. Children, she said, should always write a thank you note when an adult gives a present. That way writing a thank you note becomes a lesson in respect as well as gratitude.

"If a child is old enough to hold a crayon, he or she is old enough to write a thank you note," Gregory said.

That's the philosophy at the Boys & Girls Club in Palm Springs. Every year, the children receive donated Christmas gifts and every donor receives a handwritten thank you card from the lucky child.

Often times, it's the first thank you note the child has ever written.

"We feel it's important for kids to write thank you's," said Stephanie Brazil, executive director of the club, which has about 1,100 members and serves about 300 kids a day. "This is part of our job, teaching our kids to be good citizens."

Like many, Brazil believes the technology is to blame for the decay of the thank you note. Recently, she handed out donated gifts to a group of young children and went into her spiel on the importance of the thank you note:

"It's really important that you say thanks to Santa," Brazil tells the children gathered before her. "How are you going to tell him?"

"Call him on the cell phone?" asked 9-year-old Cindel Koenke.

"Write him an e-mail?" said Blair Pietragallo, 7.

kids need help writing a note, help them.

Do your best. Remember, it doesn't have to be fine literature and your handwriting doesn't have to be perfect. As Gregory says: "It's the thought that counts."

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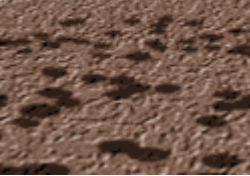
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